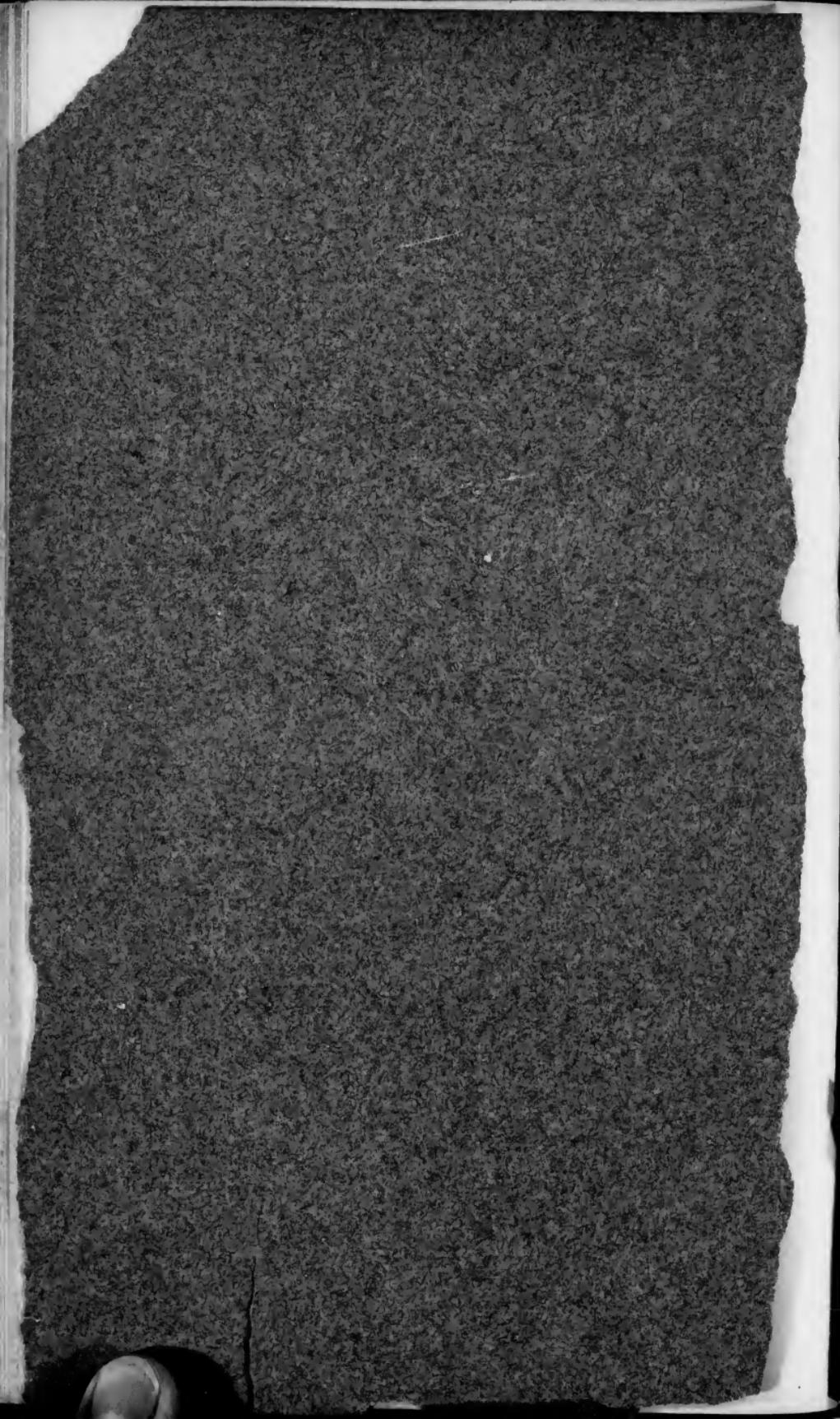


Annual Report of
Director of Traffic
— OF THE —
District of Columbia :: 1926



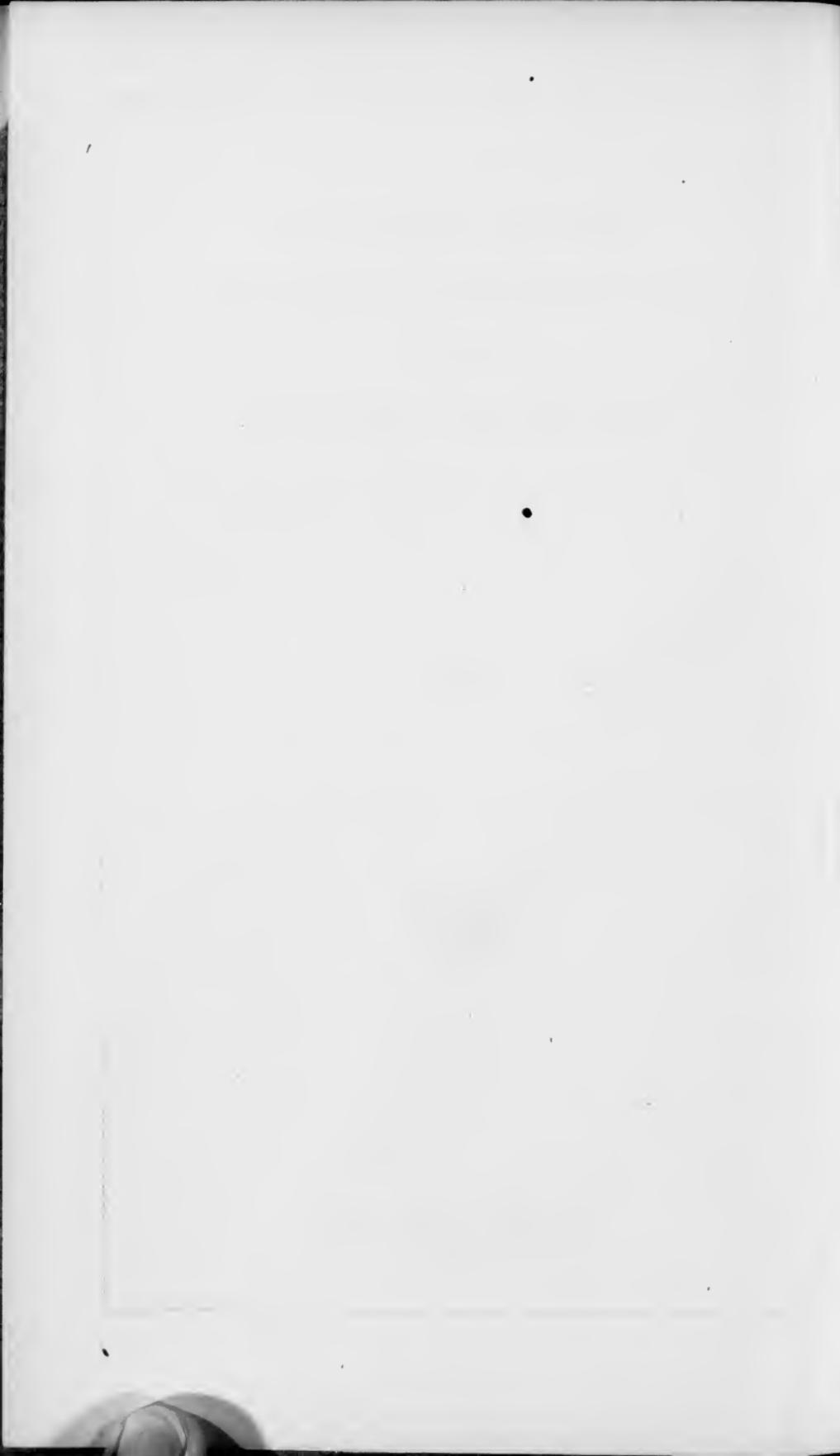
ANNUAL REPORT OF
THE DIRECTOR OF TRAFFIC
OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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1926



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ANNUAL REPORT DIRECTOR OF TRAFFIC DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

During the fiscal year ended June 30, 1926, there was an increase of 16,272 automobile registrations in the District of Columbia over the previous year, and driver's permits were issued to 17,340 new drivers. Notwithstanding this large increase in the number of cars and the number of new drivers, traffic conditions have improved.

A total of 82 persons were killed in traffic accidents during the fiscal year as compared with 86 during the previous year. Of the 82 persons killed, the responsibility for the deaths was fixed by coroner's juries on the drivers of the striking cars in 21 cases, on the persons killed in 7 cases, while the remaining number, 54, were declared unavoidable accidents.

Beginning in November, 1925, the director inaugurated a statistical service, which has for its object the compilation and study of all traffic accidents in the District of Columbia.

Complete records of all traffic accidents are received from each of the police precincts daily. These records are entered on a special form, which is then coded for punching on tabulating-machine cards. The work of sorting these cards and analyzing the records is all done by machines and gives a complete monthly analysis of the causes of accidents.

Traffic accidents totaled 3,240 during the first six months of 1926 and resulted in personal injuries to 1,087 persons. Most of these injuries were of a minor nature. Of the persons injured, 740 were pedestrians and 347 were occupants of automobiles involved in accidents.

In 62 per cent of the pedestrian accidents the fault was definitely traced to the pedestrians themselves and were largely due to inattention, jay walking, intoxication, playing in the streets, walking from behind parked cars without looking, etc. By far the greatest number of accidents due to any one cause has been traced to children playing in the streets. Of the 740 pedestrian accidents, 214 were children under 14 years of age.

Responsibility for these accidents should be placed squarely where it belongs; first, on the parents who permit their children to play in the streets, and, second, on the motorists who fail to exercise due caution in passing parked cars and other obstructions where children are at play.

Of the 3,240 accidents occurring during the first six months of 1926 a total of 2,447, or 76 per cent, occurred at street intersections. Eighty per cent of these accidents occurred during clear weather

and 69 per cent in daylight. In other words, 75 per cent of all of these accidents occurred under the most favorable driving conditions, thus indicating the need of better protection at street intersections and the exercise of greater caution on the part of motorists when approaching intersections which are occupied, or about to be occupied, by pedestrians or other vehicles.

A few years ago many traffic accidents and fatalities were attributed to the poor mechanical conditions of the vehicles involved, including bad brakes, glaring headlights, and defective steering gears. That there has been an improvement in this respect, due to a rigid enforcement of more adequate regulations relating to equipment, is shown by the following facts:

Of the 5,503 vehicles involved in the 3,240 accidents, 43 were traced to defective brakes, 23 to defective steering gears, 2 to glaring headlights, 2 to no lights, 2 to one light, and 1 to no tail light. In other words, only 73, or $1\frac{3}{10}$ per cent, of the 5,503 vehicles were found to be defective from the safety standpoint.

WHEN THE MOTORIST WAS AT FAULT

Out of the total number of accidents which occurred during the first six months of 1926 it has been possible to obtain a definite cause in only 1,350 cases where the striking vehicle was motor driven. Of this total, 227, or 17 per cent, were due to speeding and reckless driving; 176, or 13 per cent, to careless driving; 123, or 9 per cent, to skidding; 102, or 7 per cent, to failure to yield right of way; 94, or 7 per cent, to improper backing; 86, or 6 per cent, to intoxication of driver. There was only one case where the driver was found to be physically incompetent.

WHERE THE PEDESTRIAN WAS AT FAULT

Pedestrians were involved in 740 accidents from January to June, inclusive, of which 31 were killed. The causes of these accidents are classified as follows: 214, or 29 per cent, crossing the street in the middle of the block where the motorist has the right of way; 31, stepping from behind parked cars without looking; 71, children playing in the streets; 10, working in the roadway; 19, intoxicated; 46, inattentive; and 14, confused by traffic.

Of the 31 pedestrians killed, 12 were crossing the streets not at crosswalks, 3 were playing in the streets, 1 working in the roadway, and 6 crossing at crosswalks where there was no traffic officer or signal.

TYPE OF VEHICLES INVOLVED IN ACCIDENTS

Of the 5,503 vehicles involved in accidents, 3,608, or 66 per cent, were privately owned passenger vehicles; 810, or 15 per cent, were motor trucks; while 252, or 5 per cent, were taxicabs.

Of the 36 vehicles involved in fatal accidents, 22 were private passenger automobiles, 6 were trucks, 3 were taxicabs, 1 a motor cycle, and 4 street cars.

AGE OF PERSONS KILLED OR INJURED

From January to June 1,087 persons were injured in traffic accidents, of which 36 were killed. Of the number killed, 3 were under 4 years of age, 9 between 5 and 14 years of age, and 8 were over 65 years of age.

Of the injured, 67 were under 4 years of age, 217 were from 5 to 14 years of age, while 47 were 65 years of age or over.

AGE, SEX, AND RACE OF DRIVERS

Of the 2,985 striking vehicles involved in accidents, the drivers of 2,215, or 74 per cent, were white, while 686, or 26 per cent, were colored; 2,714 were males and 187 were females; 1,874, or 63 per cent, of the drivers were between 25 and 54 years of age; 696, or 23 per cent, were from 18 to 24 years of age; 39 of the drivers were under 18 years of age and 71 were over 55 years of age.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

Out of the total of 2,985 striking vehicles, the drivers of 1,366, or 46 per cent, had more than five years' experience; 734 had from two to five years' experience; 198 from one to two years' experience; 128 drivers had three months to one year's experience; 51 had less than three months experience; while 48 had no permit; and 15 were under instruction.

TIME OF DAY

In the afternoon peak hour, from 5 to 6, appears the time of day when most accidents occur. Dividing the day into five periods, it is found that accidents occur as follows:

From 7 a. m. until noon, 651, or 20 per cent.
 From noon until 5 p. m., 1,074, or 33 per cent.
 From 5 until 9 p. m., 896, or 28 per cent.
 From 9 p. m. until midnight, 470, or 14 per cent.
 From 1 a. m. until 7 a. m., 114, or 4 per cent.

DAY OF OCCURRENCE

Saturday is the day on which most accidents occur in Washington, although the records show that there is no great variation between the days of the week. Traffic accidents are distributed among the days of the week for the first six months of the year as follows:

Sundays	426	Thursdays	444
Mondays	471	Fridays	459
Tuesdays	458	Saturdays	525
Wednesdays	457		

DRIVERS' PERMITS

Through a careful examination of the traffic records of all drivers an effort is being made to eliminate from the streets as quickly as

possible that class of deliberate and persistent traffic violators who are responsible for serious traffic accidents and traffic deaths. The revocation and suspension of a large number of permits has already removed from the streets some of the most flagrant offenders.

Another long stride toward safety has been the development of practical tests on the mental and physical qualifications of prospective drivers, including an eye test.

Approximately 40 per cent of the 29,227 applicants for new permits during the past year were rejected on the first examination. A total of 17,340 new permits has been issued.

The amounts received for permits during the fiscal year were as follows:

For 4,774 permits, at \$2 each-----	\$9,548
For 12,566 permits, at \$1 each-----	12,566
For 6,850 permits (duplicate), at 50 cents each-----	3,425
Total-----	25,539

In the work of renewal of drivers' permits for the next three-year period an accurate check of the traffic records of all persons now holding permits is being made. In 500 out of 30,000 cases the records indicate that the applicant should be either rejected or reexamined, depending upon the seriousness of each case.

During the year just closed 455 permits were revoked under the traffic act of 1925 and 122 permits were restored. Two permits were suspended and the privilege of five nonresidents was canceled.

REASONS FOR REVOCATION OF PERMITS

The reasons for the revocation of the above permits were as follows:

Driving under the influence of liquor or drugs-----	228
Fleeing from scene of accident-----	87
Reckless driving-----	63
Speeding-----	42
Insane or mentally unfit-----	12
Obtaining permit by fraud-----	8
Miscellaneous offenses-----	15
Total-----	455

With this careful check of old drivers, the elimination of flagrant offenders through suspension and revocation, combined with an adequate mental and physical examination of new drivers, it is believed that there should be a vast improvement in the manner of operating automobiles in the District of Columbia during the next few years.

ENFORCEMENT OF THE TRAFFIC LAW AND REGULATIONS

The police department cooperated with the director of traffic to the fullest possible extent during the past year.

The following digest indicates the number of arrests for the various traffic violations during 1926 as compared with 1925 under the old and new code, respectively.

Type of violation	Fiscal year 1925	Fiscal year 1926	Type of violation	Fiscal year 1925	Fiscal year 1926
Backing to turn in street.....	75	187	Passing at intersections.....	121	87
Coasting with gear unmeshed (new).....	0	7	Passing signals.....	1,062	1,299
Colliding.....	1,207	1,120	Passing street cars.....	518	429
Colliding and failing to stop.....	335	323	Passing vehicle on right.....	72	75
Cut-out open.....	174	185	Reckless driving.....	611	1,767
Cutting corner.....	387	239	Tags not illuminated.....	54	25
Deal numbers.....	409	237	Violating the light regulations.....	2,355	6,373
Disobeying sign.....	1,322	2,957	Violating one-way traffic.....	372	220
Driving while drunk.....	736	770	Violating the speed laws.....	9,925	6,728
Engine running unattended.....	373	409	Violation of truck overloading.....	14	9
Failing to give signal.....	355	348	Wrong side of street.....	277	281
Failing to show permit.....	1,632	995	Wrong way around circle.....	20	30
Failing to give right of way.....	232	315	One-arm driving (new).....	0	64
Failing to turn in tags.....	40	24	Violating pedestrian regulations (new).....	0	75
Improper brakes.....	115	352	Violating the solid-tire regulation (new).....	0	25
Loaning permit.....	49	31	Driving through safety zone (new) on Sixteenth Street (new).....	0	161
No District of Columbia tags.....	247	110	Violation of horse-drawn vehicle		
No operator's permit.....	1,270	1,317	on Sixteenth Street (new).....	0	5
Obstructed tags.....	221	229	Failing to show registration card.....	1,151	916
Obstructing crosswalks.....	285	383	Violation of hacking regulations (miscellaneous).....	323	175
Obstructing drinking fountain.....	24	30	Violating miscellaneous regulations.....	248	360
Obstructing fire plug.....	123	127			
Obstructing street.....	122	163			
Obtaining permits or tags by fraud.....	18	41	Total.....	33,109	43,856
Parking regulations (mostly overtime).....	6,235	14,853			

¹ The usual charge for this offense under the new law is reckless driving.

² Principally parking lights.

ELECTRIC TRAFFIC SIGNALS

On January 6, 1926 a system of synchronized electric traffic signals was placed in operation on Sixteenth Street NW. from I Street to Florida Avenue and on Massachusetts Avenue from Twelfth to Eighteenth Streets.

The operation of these signals, at first, caused much criticism on the part of motorists who were stopped at frequent intervals and when stopped were required to wait 1½ minutes while waiting for traffic on cross streets.

In order to remedy this situation an entirely new system of coordinated operation was worked out and the change was effective on February 6. This is the first instance, in as far as can be ascertained, where a coordinated system of traffic signals has been successfully worked out. The result has been of widespread interest throughout the country at large.

Many of the large traffic centers, including New York, Boston, Newark, N. J., Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cincinnati, Columbus, and San Francisco, have sent officials to Washington to study this system and in some cases these officials have, on their return changed over their synchronized systems, so that they now operate on the Washington coordinated plan.

The results of this system of traffic control have been marked here by an enormous decrease in the number of accidents at intersections controlled by the lights. Accidents at such intersections during February, March, and April showed a decrease of 58 per cent from accidents at the same intersections in November, December, and January while the number of accidents in June was 7 as compared with 34 accidents in December, the last month in which there were no signals at these intersections.

During the six months of operation there has not been a serious accident at any of the 22 intersections controlled by electric signals and in that time only one pedestrian has been hit. This person attempted to cross Sixteenth Street at Swan Street at night against the signal and was slightly injured.

Congress has provided that "not to exceed \$350,000 of the money collected from the renewal of operators' permits" be used for extending this system of electric traffic signals, and with a view to economy in construction and in order to place these extensions where they are most needed the following plan is recommended:

The system as contemplated is divided into 11 zones of control for the purpose of economy in construction and control.

Zone 1: Extends from H Street to Florida Avenue between Fourteenth and Nineteenth Streets NW.

Zone 2: Extends from Pennsylvania Avenue to K Street between Fifth and Fourteenth Streets NW., and E Street from North Capitol to Fifth Street NW.

Zone 3: Maryland Avenue NE. from First Street to Bladensburg Road.

Zone 4: Extends along Pennsylvania Avenue from M Street NW. from Twenty-third to Thirty-fifth Street.

Zone 5: Extends along Fourteenth and Fifteenth Street NW. from Pennsylvania Avenue to New York Avenue and west on Pennsylvania Avenue to Seventeenth Street.

Zone 6: Extends from Massachusetts and New York Avenues to Rhode Island Avenue between North Capitol and Fourteenth Street NW.

Zone 7: Extends from G Street to L Street between First Street NE. and Fifth Street NW. and on Massachusetts Avenue from Fifth to Thirteenth Street NW. including the four corners of Mount Vernon Square.

Zone 8: Extends from Pennsylvania Avenue to Florida Avenue between Nineteenth and Twenty-third Streets NW.

Zone 9: Extends along Sixteenth Street from Florida Avenue to Newton Street.

Zone 10: Extends from H Street to Florida Avenue between Second and Fourteenth Streets NE.

Zone 11: Connecticut Avenue north from Calvert Street.

In these zones electric traffic signals are already installed as follows:

Zone 1: Sixteenth Street from I Street to Florida Avenue; Massachusetts Avenue, Fifteenth Street to Eighteenth Street.

Zone 7: On Massachusetts Avenue at Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets.

Signal lights are also under contract in zone 1, as follows:

On Fifteenth Street, from I Street to Rhode Island Avenue; Seventeenth Street, from I Street to Massachusetts Avenue; Rhode Island Avenue, from Fourteenth Street to Seventeenth Street NW.

Zone 7: On Massachusetts Avenue, at Tenth and Eleventh Streets and at the four corners of Mount Vernon Square, and all of zone 9.

It is hoped that during the coming year sufficient funds will be available from the reissuance of operators' permits to complete the installation of electric traffic signals on the following streets:

Massachusetts Avenue, from New Jersey Avenue to Twenty-second Street NW.

Rhode Island Avenue, from North Capitol Street to Seventeenth Street NW.

Maryland Avenue, from Second Street to Fifteenth Street NE.

Vermont Avenue, from H Street to Iowa Circle.

Florida Avenue, from Eighteenth Street to Twenty-second Street NW.

E Street, from North Capitol Street to Thirteenth Street NW.

K Street, from Ninth Street to Twenty-second Street NW.

Pennsylvania Avenue, from M Street from Twenty-fourth to Thirty-fifth Street NW.

Sixth Street NW., from C Street to Rhode Island Avenue.

Thirteenth Street NW., from E Street to Iowa Circle.

Fifteenth Street NW., from H Street to T Street.

Seventeenth Street NW., from H Street to New Hampshire Avenue.

Eighteenth Street NW., from Pennsylvania Avenue to Florida Avenue.

Twenty-second Street NW., from K Street to Massachusetts Avenue.

This system will permit the assignment of approximately 25 traffic officers to other duty and will relieve the necessity of maintaining officers during the morning and afternoon rush hours at a large number of additional posts.

Electric flashing beacons as installed on Connecticut Avenue south of Dupont Circle to protect the street-car safety zones have proven their worth in that they are the only method so far tried out that has afforded safety to those persons waiting to board street cars and have at the same time caused no damage to vehicles.

It is recommended strongly that all safety zones and loading platforms be equipped with this type of signal as rapidly as possible. It is, however, highly desirable that in adopting this particular type of signal the design should be somewhat modified to provide a more artistic appearance for use on the more important avenues, and signals of the present type, which may be installed at this time as a matter of public safety, should be moved from the more conspicuous arteries of traffic to less conspicuous posts as soon as a more artistic signal can be developed.

PERSONNEL

The personnel of the office of the director of traffic consists of the director; the assistant director, who is a traffic engineer; an administrative assistant; a statistical clerk; a file clerk; and three stenographers. In addition to this force there are four clerks employed in the police traffic bureau, under the immediate direction of Inspector Brown, who are engaged in the issuance of new permits, also a foreman of the traffic sign shop, and 13 per diem laborers who are engaged in painting and hanging signs, testing headlights, and other equipment. In addition to these regular employees there is now a force of 13 temporary clerks at the traffic bureau engaged in the reissuance of operators' permits under the three-year renewal plan recently authorized by Congress.

This office has one automobile which is assigned to and used by the traffic engineer. Another machine is urgently needed on account of the fact that it is desirable that the director have a machine at his disposal at all times in order that he may answer calls night and day in connection with serious accidents and the examination of persons involved in such accidents. In this and other official work the director has used his own private car, without compensation, ever since the office was established.

THE NEW LAW

Progress is being made under the law in connection with the suspension and revocation of driver's permits and the reissuance of permits for the next three years.

The provision of the law which enables drivers whose permits are suspended or canceled by the director to continue to operate for a period of 10 days, pending appeal to the commissioners, is a very questionable provision inasmuch as it has been clearly and conclusively shown in a number of cases that the permits should have been taken up at once, pending appeal, in order to eliminate from the streets those drivers who can not be safely trusted.

A man who is caught red-handed in a drunken condition driving an automobile should have his permit taken up forthwith.

During the past year 228 permits have been canceled on account of convictions of "driving while under the influence of liquor." During this same period 770 arrests were made for this serious traffic offense.

In practically every case where a driver is arrested for driving while intoxicated he demands and secures a jury trial, but the trials are delayed month after month on account of the crowded condition of the docket.

The enforcement of this section of the law is so hedged about with legal technicalities and delays that it has become well-nigh ineffective and something should be done to so modify or strengthen it that all persons who are guilty of this serious offense will secure swift, just, and adequate punishment.

It is suggested that inasmuch as there were 770 arrests for driving while drunk in 1926 and 736 arrests for the same offense in 1925, the District government could well afford to employ competent physicians who would be on call for an immediate examination of all persons arrested for this offense and who would be in a position to testify before judges or juries as to the condition of the individual at the time that he was brought into the station or to court.

That many of those who drive while intoxicated escape just punishment is shown by the fact that the director himself has observed drunken drivers being almost carried into court who were in such a beastly state of intoxication that they were unable to stand up and plead, and yet these same men availing themselves of their "constitutional rights" have been allowed at a later time to plead not guilty and ask for jury trials. When the trials were held—many, many months later—the juries have in the majority of cases brought in verdicts of not guilty.

Such a system may be necessary in order to preserve the so-called "constitutional rights" of the citizen, but it certainly does not tend to insure the safety of the public or to create a wholesome respect for the law.

